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TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

1. Mideast
2. Syria
3. Iraq

Key stories in the media:

Yediot and Jerusalem Post reported that PM Sharon will travel to Washington to attend the AIPAC (Jewish lobby) convention, which will open on May 15. Yediot reported that the Israeli Embassy has received instructions to coordinate a meeting between Sharon and Democratic presidential candidate Sen. John Kerry.

U.S. National Security Council Spokesman Sean McCormack told Israel Radio Washington correspondent Yaron Dekel: "The President stands by his commitment he made to Prime Minister Sharon when he was standing next to him, and by his letter to Sharon. All his commitments are 100 percent followed and we're in no way, shape or form backing away from this commitment." McCormack refused to comment on the consequences of a possible rejection of the plan by Likud voters. Yediot cited similar remarks by McCormack. Israel Radio reported that members of the GOI welcomed the remarks from the White House. The radio quoted Israel's Ambassador to the U.S. Danny Ayalon as saying that rejection of the plan would be a slap in the face of President Bush. Yediot reported that Wednesday Sharon received a report from Ayalon about an initiative taking shape in Congress to express sweeping support for Bush's letter to Sharon and the principles it contains. Israel Radio quoted UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan as saying that he will

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recommend that the Quartet give the UN a key role in the disengagement, like during Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon.

Both Yediot and Maariv led with polls showing a reversal in the voting trend of Likud members who will voice their opinion on Sharon's disengagement plan Sunday:

-Yediot's Mina Zemach (Dahaf Institute) poll found that 47 percent of Likud voters are opposed to the plan; 39 percent support it.
-The results of Maariv's Teleseker poll: 45 percent are opposed to the plan; 42 percent support it; 13 percent are undecided.

In interviews with Israel Radio and IDF Radio (as the latter is widely cited by other leading media), Sharon said that all those who support him must vote for his plan. He was quoted as saying that if his plan were defeated in the Likud referendum, it would be a victory for PA Chairman Yasser Arafat and Hamas, worsen Israel's relations with the U.S. and bring about the fall of the Likud -- "that is the extreme right's plan" (Sharon to IDF Radio). He added: "It is inconceivable that an outside group [Sharon to Maariv: a "minority"] should lead the Likud." Ha'aretz cited the concerns of the plan's supporters that their PR campaign had failed. Leading media reported that Justice Minister and Shinui party leader Yosef (Tommy) Lapid sent Sharon a letter -- coordinated with Sharon's office -- demanding that he bring the plan to the cabinet and Knesset for approval even if it fails to pass the referendum.

Israel Radio reported that the State Department issued a travel warning for Israel, following the assassination of the two Hamas leaders.

Ha'aretz reported that Congressman Henry Hyde (R-IL), inspired by the most senior ranks in the Vatican, is calling on the Bush administration to stop construction of the southern part of the security fence, which could badly affect Christian holy sites in the Holy Land.

Ha'aretz reported that the special Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) conference on anti-Semitism, which is being held in Berlin, is expected to recognize the claim that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is serving as a cover for worldwide anti-Semitic sentiment and expression. Ha'aretz and Jerusalem Post quoted Secretary of State Colin Powell as saying at the conference: "It is not anti-Semitic to criticize Israel, but the line is crossed when Israel or its leaders are demonized or villainized, for example, by the use of Nazi symbols and racist caricatures." Jerusalem Post quoted Nobel Peace Prizewinner Elie Wiesel as saying at the meeting that a true dialogue about anti-Semitism in the 21st Century must include Muslims as well as Christians and Jews.

Ha'aretz and other media quoted International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) sources as confirming that the agency's D-G, Mohammed ElBaradei, will visit Israel in July. Ha'aretz cited the doubts of Israeli sources that he will be allowed to tour the nuclear reactor in Dimona.

Ha'aretz reported that Wednesday in Cairo the members of the Israeli Arab delegation to the special Arab League meeting on the situation of Israeli Arabs met with the league's Secretary-General, Amr Moussa, who urged Israeli Arabs to continue supporting the "Palestinian struggle against the occupation. Moussa reportedly criticized the "unrestricted U.S. support for Israel." Moussa was quoted as saying: "In fact, the U.S. and Israel have one policy vis-a-vis the Palestinians. This is detrimental to the peace process."

Maariv quoted the beliefs of senior Israeli defense sources that Tuesday's bombings in Damascus were carried out by Al Qaida. The newspaper also quoted the beliefs of two unnamed U.S. Congressmen that Syrian intelligence planned and carried out the attacks. Jerusalem Post reported that Rep. Eliot Engel (D-NY), a chief sponsor of the Syrian Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act, threatened on Wednesday to develop new legislation that would not give the White House discretion on the issue unless Bush implements it soon and punishes Damascus.

Jerusalem Post reported that the Justice Ministry issued a sharp response Wednesday night but did not entirely deny a Channel 2-TV report stating that a special committee appointed by A-G Menachem Mazuz to help decide the "Greek island affair" had concluded there was insufficient evidence to indict Sharon.

All major media reported that Libyan leader Muammar Qadhafi's son, Saadi, has invited the Israeli chess team to participate in the World Chess Championships in Tripoli from June 18 until July 13.

Ha'aretz and Israel Radio reported that a confrontation between Holocaust survivors and representatives of Jewish organizations is expected to take place today at a hearing in a federal court in Brooklyn on how to divide reparation money from Swiss banks.

Hatzofe quoted former Mossad director Shabtai Shavit as saying in a speech in a synagogue on the eve of Independence Day that Israel should view the PA-controlled territories, Jordan and Sinai as Israel's "strategic backdrop."

Leading media reported that Al Quds University President Sari Nusseibeh, who was arrested Wednesday for employing Palestinians without proper entry permits, was later released on bail.

Yediot reported that for the first time the IDF will provide its colonels with American cars -- Chevrolet Operras which, however, the newspaper notes are made in South Korea and are considered basic cars. Yediot recalls that the U.S. had harshly criticized the Defense Ministry for choosing Japanese and European cars for its officers, despite the generous aid Israel is getting from the U.S.

Hatzofe reported that the Secretariat of the

Palestinian "Popular Boycotting Committee of Israeli Products" has asked the American company Caterpillar to stop selling vehicles and equipment to Israel. The group says that the company's products are used in destroying Palestinian homes.

Yediot detailed the possible implications to Israelis of the USD's current rise in world money markets.

1. Mideast:

Summary:

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "If [Sharon] fails with the Likud members, this would put Bush in a very embarrassing light.... The American response would be in kind."

Liberal columnist Yael Paz-Melamed wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv: "I ... believed that Israel needed to shoulder the bulk of the burden [of peacemaking] in being forthcoming.... [But] it is incumbent upon the Israeli left wing to support [Arafat's] disappearance from the political map, even if that requires his assassination."

Nationalist writer Uri Dan, a close associate of Prime Minister Sharon, opined in Maariv: "By a historical twist of fate, both the American and the Israeli peoples found themselves governed by leaders talking to terrorists in an identical language -- the only one they understand: force."

Block Quotes:

I. "After the Likud Referendum"

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (April 29): "Given the present state of trans-Atlantic tension and the Iraq imbroglio, the Americans will have to accommodate Sharon's critics, within the political limitations of a presidential election year. Jerusalem believes that the [U.S.] Administration will not retract its declarations on borders and refugees. According to the positive scenario, the Americans will make do with underscoring the 'positive' fundamentals of the Bush letter to Sharon, such as a Palestinian state and an agreed-upon solution. In the worst-case scenario for Israel, they will add declarations that would meet Palestinian demands, such as exchange of territories.

However, Sharon must get through the referendum first. If he fails with the Likud members, this would put Bush in a very embarrassing light, in that he would be seen as having risked his prestige and thrown his support behind an empty promise. The American response would be in kind."

II. "Yes, Assassinate Arafat"

Liberal columnist Yael Paz-Melamed wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv (April 29): "An elderly, inarticulate man whose level of corruption could make him enter the Guinness Book of World Records ... is a man whose bad influence is inimical to the lives of millions of people both in Israel and in Palestine. His name is Yasser Arafat. He is the man with nine lives, who is directly and indirectly responsible for the death of thousands of people, Israelis and Palestinians.... He is the man who, if he is not removed from here -- be it by banishment or by assassination -- the reciprocal bloodletting will continue... It is not with a light heart that I write this here. Like everyone else who believes that there is no forceful solution to the conflict, and that the only victory that is at all plausible is the removal of settlements and the establishment of a Palestinian state, I too believed that Israel needed to shoulder the bulk of the burden in being forthcoming.... Oslo was the beginning of the road, then came Camp David and Taba, and now disengagement. Public opinion in Israel has begun to change; the public has begun to understand and to reconcile itself with the fact that only a political solution will produce the quiet we all seek. But on the other side the very same anti-hero, like the phoenix, always stands.... At Camp David his deceit was fully exposed.... It is incumbent upon the Israeli left wing to support his disappearance from the political map, even if that requires his assassination. The

immorality of that action is negligible when compared to the immorality of the continued occupation, which cannot end as long as he is the 'Rais' and his word is policy."

III. "The Terror's Goal is to Overthrow Sharon"

Nationalist writer Uri Dan, a close associate of Prime Minister Sharon, opined in Maariv (April 29): "Apart from their friendship, President George Bush and Prime Minister Ariel Sharon have something else in common: the hate of radical Muslims and other Arab elements for them. Those elements want to see them defeated as soon as possible. In that sense, the Spanish syndrome that was the consequence of the Madrid massacre can only encourage them.... By a historical twist of fate, both the American and the Israeli peoples found themselves governed by leaders talking to terrorists in an identical language -- the only one they understand: force.... Islamic-Palestinian terror was surprised by the efficiency of Bush and Sharon's war, each of them in his own domain.... As the U.S. elections are getting closer, those elements will intensify their efforts to bring down Bush, even as they are trying to overthrow Sharon. The 'Islamic revolution' and its leaders believe that the clock of the 'rotten democracies' is working in their favor."

12. Syria:

Summary:

Nationalist, Orthodox Hatzofe editorialized: "The coalition states should not get excited over fabrications coming out of Damascus. The earlier they attack Syria and overthrow its regime, the better it will be for the Americans and the new government in Iraq."

Block Quotes:

"The Enigma of Syria's Explosions"

Nationalist, Orthodox Hatzofe editorialized (April 29): "A series of explosions shook Damascus's embassy area on Tuesday. In a short time the Syrian security forces controlled the situation, and the assessed damage was rather small.... Since we are talking about a dictatorship, it would be hard to trust those reports.... How is it possible that no Western embassy was harmed? How could the Syrian security services, which know every single hair on the heads of their citizens, not have known about Al-Qaida's weapons chances and organizing in Syria? Is it believable that Al Qaida is interested in implicating Syria with the West whereas it is a terrorist state that has absolutely no reservations about Al-Qaida activities?.... Syria is a terrorist state, which sponsors terrorism, including providing human resources to Al Qaida and support to Hizbullah. The coalition states should not get excited over fabrications coming out of Damascus. The earlier they attack Syria and overthrow its regime, the better it will be for the Americans and the new government in Iraq."

13. Iraq:

Summary:

Middle East affairs commentator Guy Bechor, a lecturer at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "On the eve of a democratic experiment ... [Iraq] has gone through a small, almost unbelievable miracle."

Block Quotes:

"Iraq's Small Miracle"

Middle East affairs commentator Guy Bechor, a lecturer at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (April 29): "In Iraq, the Americans are conducting an all-out war against radicalism, tribalism and conservatism -- a war that is likely to be conducted for many more years before it brings forth fruits. But they can already count some achievements. For instance, the unemployment rate, which was 60 percent last year, has

dropped to 25 percent.... The hope that Iraqi oil could fund the [country's] reconstruction looks real. Thus, a race has been created between the will to reconstruct and develop, and that to destroy and lead the country into a civil war.... On the eve of a democratic experiment, which is in effect impossible within Iraq's current structure -- a lot of blood will be spilled over this -- that country has gone through a small, almost unbelievable miracle. Time will tell how long this miracle will hold, and whether it will represent a miracle for the entire Middle East."

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